

~~SECRET//X1~~

[Next](#) [Previous](#) [Contents](#)

Preparing for the 21st Century

An Interview with NRO Director Keith Hall (U)

Editor's Note: Keith Hall's service to the Intelligence Community has spanned more than 30 years. A native of New York, Hall received degrees from Alfred University and Clark University. He commanded two overseas Army intelligence units, before coming to Washington as a Presidential Intern. Over the years, he has held senior positions in both the executive and legislative branches of government, including that of Budget Examiner in the White House Office of Management and Budget, Deputy Staff Director of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, and CIA Executive Director for Intelligence Community Affairs. In the latter capacity, Hall played a central role in implementing counterintelligence and security improvements across the IC in the wake of the Aldrich Ames spy case and consolidating US imagery and geospatial capabilities in the National Imagery and Mapping Agency. He spearheaded the development of the (b)(1) architecture and established the first integrated programming and budgeting process across the Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community. (U)

Named Director of the National Reconnaissance Office in March 1997, Hall has focused on strengthening the financial management of the organization and improving mission partnerships. He elaborated on these issues and others in an interview with members of the Studies in Intelligence Editorial Board—(b)(3)(c) and (b)(3)(c)—on 21 June 2001. (C)

* * *

Let us begin by looking back. You have had this extraordinary experience. What were your thoughts when you set off, when you were confirmed as D/NRO? (U)

I had three goals. I mentioned them to the workforce at the time, and I have been mentioning them ever since. The first goal was to get the financial house in order. The credibility of NRO programs was at risk because of the lack of confidence in the financial management. The second one was to improve our bedside manner. We were the organization everyone loved to hate. I knew that, because I had spent the previous 15 years talking to all the other agencies and entities about what they thought about each other, and I knew that the NRO always came up high on the list of, "We do not like those guys. They are arrogant." The view that others always had was, "This is a very high performing organization, but, boy, are they a bunch of SOBs." The third thing



Keith R. Hall, Director of NRO since March 1997.

(U)

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

was to prepare the NRO for the post-Cold War world. I thought that we were through the period of consolidation, budget downsizing, and all the rest of that from the early part of the 1990s. We really needed to focus on revolutionary approaches for the future. Just keeping doing what we were doing all along, in the same way we were doing it—maybe a little bit cheaper—was not the road to our survival. We needed a bold plan for the future. So those were my three objectives. (U)

How well did you do on meeting your objectives? (U)

You always look back and wish that you could have done more. But, after five years, I think we have done a reasonably good job on all three. If I had to grade us, I would give us a "B+" on financial management. We have "auditable" books. We are the only element in the Department of Defense that has auditable books. The good news is, our books are so good that they have been audited by a private accounting firm; the bad news is, we have been audited! Because we have things to do. But at least the books were audited and we know what we have to do. Our cash and finances are all in balance—we actually got good marks on our budget execution and reconciliation of cash balances. The thing that we had a problem with was plant, property, and equipment. If that were in better shape, I would give us an "A." But it is not. We have got work to do to fix that. That is another long story. But we actually did very well on the financial management front. I think we have restored confidence in the NRO's financial management abilities. I would go so far as to say that we have the best in the Intelligence Community. (U)

On the bedside manner, I would give us a "C." We have clarified in our own minds, I think, what our role is with the other intelligence agencies and the end users. There was some confusion about that. There are some who think that the NRO's only customers are NIMA [National Imagery and Mapping Agency] and NSA [National Security Agency]. But we cannot survive with just them as our customers, because they do not understand everything that we do from top to bottom in their organizations, and they do not have the expertise that we have on what the satellite systems can and cannot do. We have to interact with end users, also, so that we understand their requirements and can respond to them through our mission partners in a way that best meets their needs. By end users, I mean people who are not in the intelligence collection business, but who use intelligence—State Department diplomats, military commanders, the President of the United States, whoever that set of users is. (U)

Relations with our mission partners are still uneven. We have, at any moment in time, difficult relations with NSA. NSA, I think, looks with envy upon the size budget that we have, and feels that if they were in charge of these expenditures and they were being applied to their programs, then we would get more SIGINT bang for the buck—despite the fact that NSA, itself, has validated the architectures that we are building against the requirements. It is the perversity of the budget process that gets in the way. I think in NIMA's case, we have much better relations and a much closer working relationship. Perhaps that is because it is symbiotic. Without the overhead systems, NIMA would not have much to do, whereas with NSA, they would still have plenty to do, even without overhead systems. So, it is much more linked on the NIMA front. With our other mission partners—CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency], and Space Command—I think we are doing reasonably well. But we are still not universally trusted or loved, and our budget certainly is not fully supported in private. When our mission partners are asked, "Do you support the amount of money the NRO has?" most of them usually say "No." Even though they do give us support in open fora, and with the DCI [Director of Central Intelligence]. (U)

How did you go about achieving those broad-based goals? How did you build the team to

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

accomplish them? (U)

First of all, I do not like to use the word "I" all that much. It really was a corporate effort. I believe in collaborative management, and I also believe in delegating and giving people a job to do, and then trying to get out of their way. What I tried to do was provide the leadership. One of the manifestations for that was in our strategic planning process. After agreeing on a vision at the outset, we established 11 strategic goals. We have had 20 offsites since I have been at the NRO, including the time when I was Acting Director. We do it about every three months. That is the time when we sit down and take stock of what we are doing over the long term, and where we are trying to get to. Otherwise, I find, no matter what your intentions are on any given day when you come into work, you are wedded to your inbox, the phone, the e-mails that you have to get out, and the issues of the day, not the long-term direction. So, around those three objectives, we established 11 corporate goals. Some of the objectives had many goals attached—certainly in the area of financial management—that went beyond having books that reconcile and got at trying to be the best-in-class in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. You cannot do any of this without having a motivated workforce, personnel who feel rewarded both by their work and by managers who convey that their work is valued. (U)

We set up a scorecard that consists of customer goals, business and process goals, employee goals, and financial management goals. Then I appointed one of my senior executives in the NRO to be both the goal manager and the director of the whole enterprise for that particular area. In some cases, it fell kind of naturally. The financial management goals went to the equivalent of our comptroller. But the other areas cut across the organization and were outside the normal boundaries of the wiring diagram. For example, the head of my Imagery Intelligence Directorate was put in charge of the workforce goal—attaining and maintaining a world-class workforce. Each goal had a goal champion who was responsible for telling the Board of Directors, "Here are the objectives, here is the plan to get there, and these are the resources we need." (U)

What is your view of leadership? Can you share some of your thinking on how you create followers as well as a next generation of leaders? (U)

First of all, I think that the offsites went a long way towards forcing people to confront complacency. That was part of it. The other part was how we evolved our management meetings. When I first came to the NRO, there was a thing called the Management Committee, the MCM... the second "M," I guess, stood for "Meeting." We would sit there, listen to a briefing, have a discussion, and then make a decision. I revamped that. What we have now is a Board of Directors. If we are going to have an issue meeting where a decision is to be rendered, we send out a "read-ahead," and we set the rule that there is no briefing at the meeting to present the issue. We are not perfect in this. Sometimes people will say, "Can I put up one or two viewgraphs just to frame the issue?" and sometimes that is helpful, so we allow it. But we do not allow any full-scale briefings. People are expected to come to the meeting prepared to discuss the issue, not to get informed on what it is that they have to make a decision on. We try and go around the table. As I said, I have a participatory leadership style, so I am open to any and all suggestions, ideas, and points of view, even if they differ from mine or other people's around the table. We try and provoke a good discussion on these types of things. (U)

We have a mentoring program that was begun fairly recently, but I decided to kick start it by being the first out of the Executive Committee group to say, "I am going to mentor some people." I do not know whether or not people actually volunteered, or were volunteered by their Board members, but I sat down with a group of seven for two hours at a time, in seven sessions over the

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

period of December-January 2001, when I thought I was leaving. We structured that period of time to accomplish what they wanted to achieve from the mentoring. (U)

We have also attempted to identify leadership attributes. As a start, on my badge here, it says "NRO Leaders, Catalysts for Change." Then, we expanded on the things that we expect leaders in the NRO to do, including creating a responsive workforce that provides superior customer service; providing a strategic view linking the work that people are doing at any moment in time to broader goals; and thinking and acting corporately, as opposed to parochially, whether parochial means my agency, my office, or my tower, in the case of the NRO. Leaders must walk the talk. We have tried to set the tone that way. I guess time will tell. (U)

I think that we have pretty good bench strength in terms of people ready to take on big jobs at the NRO. Whenever someone leaves—retires, gets reassigned, or what have you—we seem to have a number of good people to choose from. I think we have a pretty strong talent pool. This is helped by the fact that we rely on the larger leadership and skill development resources of the Air Force, Navy, and CIA, and those three organizations are not slouches in developing leaders. (U)

Could we talk about that dynamic—different cultures, different kinds of objectives? (U)

At the very first offsite that we had in 1996, we came up with a vision statement that said, "Freedom's sentinel in space, one team revolutionizing global reconnaissance." The "one team" part of this vision captures the answer to your question. We recognized that we came from a legacy of really different cultures—an Air Force culture, a Navy culture, a CIA culture—and that we were flowing into a new organizational arrangement that was creating cultures of signals intelligence, imagery, and communications. As a result, the distance between tower two and tower three could be just as big as the distance between Los Angeles and Langley back in the Program A and Program B days.¹ We clearly recognized that we were not one team. That extended to our mission partners—NSA and NIMA—which we absolutely rely on. We were not one team with them, either. So we recognized we had different cultures and we needed to have a better team approach to things. (U)

Five years later, have we made progress? Yes, we have made progress. But we still have different cultures. I think that, as long as we rely on the Air Force, the Navy, and the CIA separately to do the management of the personnel, and people have an allegiance back to those organizations, we are not going to have complete cohesion of the NRO workforce. But that is not all bad. I think that one of the things that the CIA presence, for example, brings to the NRO is a focus on the intelligence mission that you do not have from the rocket scientists and acquisition professionals that come in from the Air Force and the Navy. We have very few intelligence officers in the NRO outside the people from CIA. We do not bring any military people into the NRO, by and large, until they have had ten years' experience, and we get to cherry-pick who we want. As a result, we get a very good pool of technically skilled people in acquisition, program management, and all the rest, but they do not have an intelligence background. In addition to their connection to the intelligence mission, CIA personnel provide continuity, because they can stay longer. The different cultures have their individual advantages. I think we have about the maximum amount of team balance that we are going to achieve right now. The baggage that would come from becoming a whole-up agency—where we would run our own personnel system, do our own recruiting, and all the rest—is not worth the effort, as far as I am concerned. I think the advantages from living with the different cultures are probably good. (U)

Please expand on the comment that you made recently about the role that mission motivation

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

plays in team-building at the NRO. (U)

When the IG [Inspector General] came in and looked at the NRO right after I got here, it was not only the IG at CIA, it was the DoD IG—a joint team. As you can imagine, with the financial management challenges that the NRO faced, we had more auditors than rocket scientists out there in 1996. The IG gave us a report that started out, "There is an unusual degree of attention to the mission." I mean, the mission focus of this organization was worthy of noting in the IG report—it was above and beyond anything that they had seen previously. Of course, that was part of our problem. We were saying, "Let us get the mission done, and we will worry about the books and the money later." (U)

(b)(1) The mission itself, I find, brings a team together. If you look back ten years, there were two separate [redacted] satellite teams—one at CIA, building one satellite, and the other in the Air Force, building another. Both were doing signals intelligence collection, but each had a [redacted] and was going after [redacted] targets. We have come a long way. What we have now is called a space SPO [System Program Office], which builds high altitude systems and has CIA, Air Force, and even some Navy people in it all together. When you get a team like that together, this thing that they are causing to be created is almost like a child. I guess I would liken it to a mother and father being different sexes, but still one family. And, by God, that satellite is theirs. It is that type of mission focus, particularly since you also have a very dynamic event, the launch, that leads to the birthing. I mean, everybody works towards the launch day, and pours heart and soul into it, government and industry alike, and, when it is successful, the team really feels that they have accomplished something important. I guess it is like taking the hill if you are in the Marines. That causes the teamwork to form around the mission. That is not what worries me, however; it is all of the extraneous stuff, not really associated with the mission, but in the support arena, where the culture gets in the way—Air Force people being treated better than CIA people, or vice versa; or, "I cannot get my organization to let me stay as long"; or, "Why are CIA people allowed to come in in casual clothes, and General Weston still requires me to show up in my Class A uniform?" It is that type of stuff that is probably more the irritant on the cultural side. (S)

If you look ahead five years, at the role of CIA within the NRO and the role of the military within the NRO, do you see the relationship changing? Do you see it stable? What is desirable? (U)

In order for me to answer that, I have to talk about what I see as the long-range situation all tipped to national security in space, and that is tied up in the Space Commission recommendations, which, by the way, I wholeheartedly support. I advocated last summer that they do something very similar to what they ended up doing. I was not the only one advocating it, but I did advocate a radical change. What I see is a shift occurring. If the Defense Department is serious about the centrality of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and C4 ISR in the conduct of future military operations, the country is going to require a much more robust C4 ISR capability than anything that we have today, as good as what we have today is.² I think that the natural outcome over the next 10 to 20 years will be to move from things that are basically suitable for reconnaissance to a system that is really surveillance. Rather than a periodic ability to learn information about what is going on somewhere in the world, we would transform the whole system into one that provides nearly continuous coverage of particular locations on demand. That is going to require a lot more resources in the space arena than what the DCI is going to put forward because of his own needs. He does not need continuous surveillance. (U)

What I see happening is a gradual shift in the preponderance of space activities from one that has

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

had the DCI in the lead—through the NRO, where we do more, we spend more, our systems are more complex, more state-of-the-art, in terms of the national security community today—over to the Defense side. What you will see is what I call "NETCAP," which would be "National Exploitation of Tactical Capabilities." For years, we have had the inverse of that. We have had tactical exploitation of national capabilities. The DCI builds up the national intelligence capability, and then the Services find a way to use it to support tactical operations. I think the opposite will take place over the next 10 to 20 years. You will see robust constellations of imagery, signals intelligence, and other types of sensor systems in orbit, which are largely financed by the military side of the budget, and the DCI, if we have done it smartly, will be able to hook into that. You will have a situation where the DCI, who would never pay to be able to look, for example, at the palaces in Iraq continuously, would use the capability—as long as it is not being used somewhere else. That is what I see happening. (U)

Now, what organizational construct will that take? I think that the fastest path there is to use NRO-type business practices—streamlined management from cradle-to-grave, reliance on industry, all the things that I think have made the NRO great over the years. Indeed, the Space Commission has said, "Air Force, do it like the NRO does," and pull the disparate expertise in the Air Force that does R&D, acquisition, and operations, into one entity, just like the NRO does it. I think that you will eventually start seeing some areas of merger between black [classified] and white space. When that happens, the DCI will need to keep his hand in and make sure that, as this is fashioned, it is done in a way that, even though the Defense Department is putting up most of the funding, the DCI's equities can be addressed in the system. Of course, what he can contribute is considerable talent in the form of the CIA workforce, which he should keep involved in this effort as "CIA personnel," not transferring them to the Department of Defense. Do it just like the NRO has done for years, with CIA and DoD people together. I think that is the road ahead. (U)

At the end of this, what is likely to exist? It could be a Defense agency, in partnership with the DCI. It could be a Department of Space as another entity in the Department of Defense with, perhaps, a sizeable CIA contingent there looking out for the things that the DCI is particularly interested in. It could be a Space Corps within the Air Force. It could take any of those directions, but, over the long term, we probably do not need both a Department of Defense white space apparatus and an NRO. When? Ten, 15, 20 years from now—whenever there is a good business case to be made for it. (U)

Address, if you will, the partnership with the private sector. How have you seen that evolve, and where do you see it going? (U)

Obviously, the private sector is the lifeblood for the NRO. We rely on industry to get our job done. Ninety-five percent of our resources are put on contract, so we have always had a very special relationship with industry. I would give you a couple of points on this. Number one, in the space segment itself—when I say space segment, I am talking about things that actually fly in orbit—the state-of-the-art work continues to be financed overwhelmingly by the government. Industry is not real heavy on taking risks in terms of technologies in space. They may take some risks on whether or not they are going to make money off the thing they are putting into space, but they are not going to take risks on whether or not the thing is going to work. The private sector is not the one that drives the development of state-of-the-art space-deployed capabilities—the government is. We have to recognize that, to the extent that space is important to our nation and to our economy, continued, heavy government investment for the foreseeable future in state-of-the-art space capabilities will be required. That is different from the information technology field, where a decade or more ago the government really lost the edge. Industry is driving state-of-the-art

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

developments there. Not true in space, and I do not think very many people appreciate that. The government is where the action is on the development side, and, as a consequence, we have a direct effect on the nurturing of the space industry, to the extent that it is going to go commercial. (U)

Point number two is that we had Booz-Allen do a major study of the space industrial base last year, under sponsorship of the NRO and the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition. That told us that, given the current base of business in both the commercial and government sector—which includes NASA [the National Aeronautics and Space Administration] as well as the Department of Defense and the NRO—we still had over-capacity in the aerospace industry. As the study noted, it is apparent that there is going to be more consolidation going on, even though we have had a tremendous amount of consolidation already. Shortly after that, Northrup-Grumman said it was buying Litton TASC. (U)

How have the dot coms affected the aerospace industry? (U)

Many of the aerospace companies were heavily in debt in the 1990s. The return on investment in the aerospace business, particularly for those companies that were reliant primarily on government business, was miniscule compared to the rates of return that investors could get when they went into dot coms or some of the other startup companies. Now, that has tailed off somewhat. But how long is that going to be the case? I think that whole area, after the euphoria is over and people look at it with clearer vision, is going to come back. What we are going to see is a continuation of the problem we had before. Given their low rates of return, the aerospace companies will have a hard time holding onto the talented workforce that they need to do the high end of the space business that the government is fostering. I think we need more rational policies with regard to this arena. I think that it is probably more of a problem on the white space side than it is on the classified space side, primarily because the last people that want to leave are the people working on our type programs—they are so interesting, and the people feel they are so important that, as long as people see that there is work ahead in this business, they will stay the course, even if they could go to a dot com and make a few more bucks. But, it is an area of worry. (U)

The last thing I would say is that the landscape has changed for the NRO since we came out into the open. By necessity now, we have to be more defensive in our interactions with industry, because of the ease with which the companies can protest our source selection decisions. There was not a single protest of an NRO acquisition decision in the first 30 years of its existence. It was only after we came out into the public eye that companies began using the tools available to them in the General Accounting Office to levy protests. Now, we have had protests, or at least the opening gambits of protests, on practically every major acquisition decision that the NRO has made in the last nine years. That fosters a more standoffish relationship with industry than what the NRO is used to having. We are having to grapple with that. (U)

I first raised the issue of protests at a meeting that we had with aerospace industry CEOs—I think it was in 1997. At that time, industry knew we were getting ready to embark on a whole new future imagery architecture acquisition. Two of the companies that ended up being the final prime offerers said, "We will take a no-protest pledge. Where do we sign up?" I consulted with my lawyers, and the lawyers said, "Well, they can sign a pledge, but they do not give up their rights by doing that." They cannot sign away the rights granted to them by law and the Constitution. So the lawyers said it would not be worth anything. The two companies whose CEOs had said, "We will not protest. If we lose fair, we will not protest," lost the bid. Of course, we had a protest! Anyway, we have to be a lot more defensive, and that means that we have to be careful that we do not share

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

with one company things that we are not sharing with the others. We probably have always done that, but I think we are just much more cautious now. In the past, the focus was on getting the job done, not on making sure that you are not going to lose a protest. (U)

There was a remark in the paper this morning about the Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Space Command talking about the vulnerability of space. From your perspective, what is the vulnerability of space? (U)

The vulnerabilities of space systems are among the most highly classified things that we deal with, because we do not want to advertise specific weaknesses. Let me speak about it in general terms. What everybody in the world has basically learned is that if you are an important target and you stay put for any length of time, your life expectancy decreases rapidly. There are two obvious defensive measures. One is going deep, hard, underground with some of the high-value targets, which is obviously something that vexes us. The other thing is going mobile. But there is a third thing that they can do, and that is attack the basis of the US ability to identify threats, and that involves the entire intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and C4 apparatus that we operate. Any manager in this area, recognizing that the world clearly sees how capable we are and that our capability makes a target out of anything that is key in the intelligence cycle, has got to ask, "Am I protected? Can I survive? What do I have to do to harden against cyber attack, against terrorist attack, against physical attack, in orbit, on the ground?" We have looked at all of that, and I think have appropriate plans in place that match the threat. But, just like any defense, I would much rather be on the offense than on the defense. As we see every day across the Intelligence Community, we are successful against defenses that are supposedly secure. This is troubling, and I am glad to see that it is getting the attention it deserves. We will see whether or not this translates into resources. Whenever the Intelligence Community in the past has been faced with an investment decision between more capability that delivers more information versus expenditures that do nothing more than provide protection of the means to do the collection, as a Community, we always opt for more collection and live with the vulnerability. I am hopeful that will not be the answer as we go into the future. (U)

You had long experience on Capitol Hill and then became subject to Congressional oversight as D/NRO. Would you look back at oversight generally, and then particularly with respect to the NRO and where are we today? (U)

I think oversight is moving through what is probably a natural cycle. We have probably reached the part of the cycle that is indicative of the enduring relationship between the Intelligence Community and the oversight committees. In the case of intelligence, the cycle initially was characterized by very strong support, nurturing, and protecting of the Intelligence Community, after what Congress—and the executive branch, as well, and the public, probably—perceived as the excesses of the oversight reviews of intelligence that took place in the early-to-mid-1970s. The intelligence committees were formed, and, if you look at their writings and my interaction with some of the members, they clearly saw their mission as protecting the Intelligence Community from the excesses that might occur as a result of that furor that was stirred up in the 1970s. So, the first part of the cycle was almost a honeymoon period, strangely enough. Next came the first major set of difficulties between the executive branch and the Congress that shook the foundation of that nurturing relationship. It involved the controversy surrounding aid to the Nicaraguan Contras. That break in the honeymoon period involved the House first, because the House was opposed to Contra aid. The Senate was in favor of it, but, even then, there were difficulties in dealing with the Senate. I can certainly have a separate session with you on the whole mining of the harbors incident and give you my perspective on it, but the Agency really screwed that up—not that the

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

Senate intelligence committee was without fault. (U)

I say that the evolution of the oversight relationship is a natural cycle, because there is no way that you could set up the separation of powers arrangement and stay in a honeymoon for a long time, anyway. Something was going to come up that would shake the foundation. Ever since then, we have been in more of a "Congress is skeptical of the executive branch" phase of the cycle, with them probing and looking for things that are going wrong, while at the same time trying to protect the areas that they want to protect. It is a much more even-keeled arrangement now. When I say "even-keeled," it is the standard separation of powers difficulties that you are going to have, with two different points of view. I always point out to folks that this ends up working pretty well. You know, do not look at how the sausage is made—you do not want to know. But the end result, in most cases, is not that bad. I also like to point out that the advantage we have in the executive branch is that we are able to reject most of our stupid ideas in private. In Congress, they have to state their stupid ideas and reject them in public! So you get to see how the sausage is made. The sausage is just as ugly in the executive branch; it is just that we get rid of most of the evidence of the bad ingredients privately. (U)

The net advantage to the Intelligence Community of having strong, empowered oversight committees—which the Congress itself vests with the authority to look into intelligence matters and then basically stay out of them—is important. As much as we may not like that proctology, we have to recognize that unpleasant procedures are good for our own long-term health. The alternative is not a blank check; it is much more intrusive, wider-ranging action in the Congress vis-à-vis the intelligence branch committees. (U)

The Constitution comes as close as you can to a job description for a senator or a member of the House, but, if one were to write such a job description in executive branch parlance, one of the prominent requirements would be, "Be outraged when the executive branch screws up." Congress does not need any training at this. They know how to do this automatically! Congress was in full outrage mode by the time I came to the NRO, because of the financial management difficulties that the organization was in. In one respect, I had the advantage of "it could not possibly get any worse"! As I said earlier, I think we have gradually eliminated the main source of the problem in our relationship. We have returned to a period where the committees have confidence in our ability to manage our finances and accurately report to them what we are doing. If you look at the outcome of the NRO Commission—which was chaired by Senator Robert Kerrey, who had been the Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and Representative Porter Goss, the Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence—and what it had to say about the NRO, you clearly see that the NRO is an institution that has the respect of certainly those two members and the other Congressional members on the Commission as well. While they found areas that needed improving, their report showed a very healthy recognition of the accomplishments of the organization that continue to this day. So I think we have returned to the same norm that everybody else is at, vis-à-vis the Congress. There is a certain degree of difficulty in conveying things that are complex and technical to members of Congress, who do not have a lot of time. We are no different in this regard than the S&T [Directorate of Science and Technology] at CIA, or NSA. I do not claim any special problem in that regard. (U)

Is there anything that keeps you awake at night? (U)

There are a lot of things that keep me awake at night. "Screams in the night," as I call them. Number one is the fear associated with something like a terrorist attack at one of our installations that really could have a tremendously deleterious effect on the nation's intelligence capabilities.³

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

The NRO started with the notion that we would achieve our protection based upon secrecy. Since nobody would know where we were, they could not attack us. Well, we have been in the same places for a long time, and people know where we are. There are limits to the amount of physical protection we can give to locales that started out with the notion that we were going to be safe because we were [redacted] That is my number one worry, because that could be a devastating blow, not only to the personnel of the NRO, but also to the continuity of operations that are critical to national security. Obviously, we are doing everything we can to [redacted]

[redacted] (S)

The second thing that has concerned me is the [redacted] To free up money to modernize the systems for the post-Cold War mission, the NRO [redacted]

(b)(1)

[redacted] As we were swinging from tree to tree, we let go of the branch, and now we are in mid-air, swinging towards the other one. We generally do not do that. We usually will hold onto the old one until we get a firm grip on the new one! It looks like we will [redacted]

[redacted] We clearly could have some [redacted] in the level of support that the nation is used to, if things go wrong, if we have launch failures with the new systems, or if the new systems do not work, God forbid. They will work. But the [redacted] worries me, because, while everybody was part of this [redacted] I do not think that the nation would look kindly upon the NRO if it turns out that [redacted] was not something we should have done, in retrospect. (S)

The third thing that I think would keep any Director awake at night, and I am sure it worries all my Intelligence Community counterparts, is the bad actor inside—you know, a Hanssen or an Ames. That is the "scream in the night." When you look at how linked the NRO is across all our networks and at the ease of getting information across the entire enterprise—we do have a very capable infrastructure in this regard—a bad actor on the inside could really do us a lot of damage, not just from stealing information, but also from putting viruses, and what have you, in our information systems. (U)

The final thing is some type of major screw-up that causes us to come back on the oversight committees' scope as another poster child for ineffective government, like we were in the middle of the 1990s with our financial management. I do not think the NRO could stand a second one of those, whether it would be a major overrun or some other huge mistake that causes something not to work. Again, I do not think that any of the things I just said are likely, but you could not be the Director of the NRO and not worry about those types of things. (U)

In closing, I would like to ask you to think back on your 31 years of being in the intelligence business. Talk to the next generation about this business. What is it that you find satisfying about your career? (U)

Well, as I look back at 31 years—do not get me wrong, I have had some bad days that were not the greatest fun—on balance, there was not a day, by and large, that I did not look forward to coming in to work and feel that the work I was doing was important. I imagine there are other places in the government where you get that feeling, but in intelligence, you have the combination of very challenging work and being operational all the time. Look at our colleagues in the Department of Defense, for example. They are getting ready to do something that they hope they never have to do. In the intelligence business, we are fighting the information systems of our adversaries every day, so we are in the trenches in some way all the time. You can easily connect the dots between something that you are doing and something that has affected the life of the

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

nation in some way—some decision, some direction, or some position that the nation is taking. That is, indeed, tremendously satisfying work. I think that the combination of the challenge and the psychic reward you get from doing it—of course, that is the only reward you get, unless you are heading towards Leavenworth!—really makes the intelligence field a fascinating and wonderful place to be. It is a privilege to be a part of it. I say this no matter which part of the Intelligence Community one might go into. I think all of them have this attribute, whether you are in the DO [Directorate of Operations] in CIA, a cryptanalyst at NSA, an all-source analyst at DIA, or a rocket scientist at the NRO—it does not make any difference. (U)

As I look to the future, we have to find a way to get around the inefficiencies and barriers to getting the job done that are there because our organizational structure dates to Dwight Eisenhower and Harry Truman. It made great sense in the 1940s and 1950s, but it really is in the way now. I like to point out that at any moment in time, the Intelligence Community is three MOAs [Memorandums of Agreement] away from getting the job done! Fortunately, when there is a crisis—the Balkans, Kosovo, an EP-3 [reconnaissance aircraft] down in China, whatever the crisis is—we forget about the need for an MOA, and we sit down and get the job done, and we end up doing a pretty good job of it. But, in almost any other venue—the budget, the planning cycle, anything short of a crisis—we do not do very well. As a consequence, I think we get less out of the systems than what we have invested in them. We do not do our analysts any favors, because we maintain stovepipe prerogatives. They make the job of an all-source analyst, for example, much more difficult than it would be if we were cooperating and not all trying to get the credit for providing this little nugget of information or that one. (U)

The two things that divide us as a Community are the budget and ignorance. We have been trying, as a Community, at the senior level anyway, to work the ignorance problem. We have not found a way to cause the leadership of the Intelligence Community, the agencies at the next level down, to start supporting somebody else's budget other than their own. But we have to get there eventually. And that is just at the top level. I mean, if the seniors are that way, you can imagine the trench warfare that is going on down below. Again, fortunately, when it really counts, we do not put up with all that foolishness. We really pull together as a team. We have just got to find a way to do that across the board of activities that the Community is involved in. (U)

May we ask what is next for Keith Hall? (U)

I do not have the slightest idea. I have 31 years in, and, according to CIA, somewhere around 70 percent of my high three is all I will get. So, at the point where I leave the government, that is when I will start figuring out what I am going to do next. I am sure I will find something to do. But I do not want to start looking yet. (U)

As I recall, when you came to the NRO, you said you really had two jobs that you wanted in life. One was to be the Director of the NRO, and the other was to be the coach of the Baltimore Orioles. (U)

Well, one out of two ain't bad. I do not know what I am going to do. I certainly want to stay connected with the Intelligence Community. I do like to talk about this stuff, so, after I am retired, if you would like to call me in to the Center for the Study of Intelligence to give some talks on my perspective, I would be happy to do so. (U)

We will take you up on that. Thank you. (U)

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009

Footnotes

1. A reference to the NRO's organization from 1961-1992, when its components were divided into separate accounts by agency: Air Force (Program A), CIA (Program B), and Navy (Program C). (U)
2. C4 refers to command, control, communications, and computers. (U)
3. D/NRO made these comments several months before the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. (U)

[Next](#)

[Previous](#)

[Contents](#)

~~SECRET//X1~~

(b)(3)(c)

3/30/2009